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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002922

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TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: MIDTERM CABINET SHUFFLE ADDRESSES
SECURITY CONCERNS

Classified By: Charge Michael A. Butler, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Halfway through his five-year term, President Saca has created a new Ministry of Public Security and Justice to combat the nation's spiraling violent crime. Rene Figueroa, until now Minister of Governance, will head the new ministry, while former Vice Minister Aguilar will remain at the now-reduced Ministry of Governance, overseeing a primarily non-crime-related portfolio. The current head of the nation's port authority (CEPA) will lead the new GOES entity charged with the implementation of El Salvador's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact. Cabinet changes also occurred at the Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. Saca seems keen to appear proactive in taking action against crime, although his selection of Figueroa to spearhead such efforts could put the latter's 2009 presidential bid at risk. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) President Saca announced December 4 that by executive decree, a new Ministry of Public Security and Justice would be created by dividing the responsibilities of the existing Ministry of Governance. (Note: Often referred to as a "super-ministry", the Ministry of Governance was created in 2001 by former President Francisco Flores by combining the functions of what had originally been three separate ministries: Justice, Interior, and Public Security--the latter of which had been created by President Calderon Sol (1994-1999). End note.) The Ministry of Public Security and Justice will be financed by a \$100 million World Bank loan, and will commence operations in January under the leadership of former Minister of Governance Rene Figueroa. The new ministry will include oversight of the Civilian National Police (PNC), prisons, witness protection programs, National Anti-Drug Commission, National Public Security Academy (ANSP), the new bilateral International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), and Interpol. The rump Ministry of Governance, to be headed by former Vice Minister Silvia Aguilar, will remain in charge of immigration, postal service, firefighters, community vigilance groups, and public events security, among other responsibilities.

13. (SBU) Vice Minister of Governance Astor Escalante will accompany Figueroa as his Vice Minister for Public Security and Justice, while Juan Miguel Bolanos will serve as Vice Minister of Governance and Justice under Minister Aguilar. (Note: Bolanos currently serves as an ARENA Legislative Assembly Deputy, and will seek a leave-of-absence from his legislative office in order to assume his new position. End note.) In other cabinet switches, Juan Jose Llorca, who until now headed the nation's semi-autonomous port authority (CEPA), will assume oversight of the implementation of the \$460 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact as head of a new GOES entity, "Fondo del Milenio" (FOMILENIO). Hugo Barrera, who has served as Minister of the

Environment and Natural Resources since Saca's 2004 inauguration, will take over at CEPA, while Vice Minister of Public Works Carlos Guerrero will replace Barrera at the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources.

14. (C) COMMENT: Figueroa underscored that the creation of the new ministry "...demonstrates the understanding and will of the government to dedicate a ministry one-hundred percent to fighting crime." While a midterm cabinet shuffle is nothing out of the ordinary, Saca clearly wants to use the occasion to send a signal that he is serious about addressing the nation's staggering violent crime problem. Given Saca's apparent preference for Rene Figueroa as his successor in 2009, placing Figueroa in a position where he will be held accountable for progress--or lack thereof--in fighting crime appears to be a calculated gamble. Figueroa must now make significant inroads in his fight against gang-related crime during the next two and a half years--lest he hazard his candidacy before it is even born. END COMMENT.
Butler